

Entry #4

• getting started on your portfolio •

Entry #4 is by far the most practical place to begin working on your portfolio. Here you demonstrate your commitment to learning, your contributions to the profession, and your development as a learner and a leader/collaborator. You show how you share your expertise, and how you partner with families and the community you work in. The writing skills that you develop here have carryover value to your other three entries.

This entry is called ***Documented Accomplishments*** for a reason: you must present clear, concise and consistent evidence that your efforts have resulted in *improved student learning*. Keep in mind that not everything you do in the community outside the workplace is appropriate for this entry. Extracurricular activities, such as sponsoring a club in your subject area, may provide lots of wholesome fellowship and camaraderie, but they may not show a clear, convincing nexus to improved student performance. Travel experiences, academic distinctions, memberships in civic, fraternal or professional organizations are ***not***, in and of themselves, bona fide accomplishments, either. Even advanced degrees and awards are unusable, unless you can link them somehow to a concrete example of improved student learning.

Whatever you choose to submit as an accomplishment, be sure you ***demonstrate with examples*** how it impacts your students' learning. Your accomplishment should reflect something you have done beyond the normal scope of your duties, something that exceeds standard, routine and expected performance. The value of each accomplishment lies in your ability to ***prove*** your students learned more.

Ground rules

Scrupulously follow your instructions manual regarding procedural matters such as: 1) approved fonts, 2) specified font size, 3) double-spacing, 4) page margins, 5) page number limitations --- excessive pages will not be scored. It is strictly against the rules for a mentor to show you his/her portfolio. Please don't ask. Seeing someone else's portfolio works against your best interests, because imitating someone else's format or style would short-circuit your own creativity and spontaneity, 2) it could leave you with the misguided impression that there is some kind of "winning" formula that guarantees success. No mentor knows, and no assessor will tell you, the exact scoring formula. The NBPTS portfolio is a *process of personal self-discovery* in which every candidate must create his own individual path to ***achievement***. Quality work requires extended time. Get started early, and avoid procrastination. Frustration and sacrifice are normal. Expect them.

It is assumed you are reasonably proficient at using a word processor. If not, the time has come to learn! Portfolio work is nearly impossible any other way. Remember, too, that keyboarding skills will also be required at the testing center. To practice your keyboarding skills, a very realistic mock-up of the testing center screen format is available online through the NBPTS site <http://www.NBPTS.org>.

Role of the mentor

Mentors are fellow teachers who have gone through the NBPTS process and serve as advisors/consultants. They do not need to be in your instructional field, nor do they necessarily teach on the same age level as you do. They are not responsible for your achieving. They are there to offer counsel and support, but they will be careful not to superimpose their own ideas and prejudices. They will not pass judgment on the merits of your entry. They will not tell you “This is correct” or “That is wrong”. Mentors are not allowed to help you compose your basic text. They will not create a framework for you. Do not rely on your mentor to redo poorly written syntax. They are more likely to ask questions, like “I’m not sure I understand that statement. Can you word that more clearly?”, “Can you show me documented evidence of how this accomplishment impacts your students’ learning?”, “Can you explain that to me another way?”, “What are you trying to say?”. Listen to your mentor’s questions carefully for clues as to things you might want to consider.

Practical suggestions

Do yourself a favor. The following suggestions will save you a lot of grief:

Documented Accomplishments	Candidate ID# 9999999
7. Reflection (Suggested length: two pages)	
What in the featured instructional sequence worked well, or did not work well, in advancing the learning of these two students? How would you change what did not work well?	
xxxxx	
How did your use of instructional resources and/or technologies enhance the planning or implementation of the lesson?	
xxxxx	
Did you have to make any unexpected changes to your planned instructional sequence? What changes did you make? What prompted the changes? (Relate this to your knowledge of language and language acquisition.)	
xxxxx	
Would you change the assessment strategies or the type of feedback you provided? Why or why not?	
xxxxx	
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- 1) Make yourself a *word processing matrix page* that contains the required information, such as Entry number and ID number in the header, and a page # in the footer. This way, all of your pages will have a consistent appearance, and you’ll not have to worry about forgetting any important required information. As you work, every 15 minutes, or any time you make any substantial change in your document, use the **save as** command to *re-save your document under a new version number*. [E.g. Entry #4, vers1, Entry #4, vers2, Entry #4, vers3, etc.] Not only will you avoid losing irreplaceable data, but you will also have backup copies of all earlier versions available for later reference.
- 2) Next, turn the text color to **red**, and *type in the exact wording of all of your questions copied verbatim from your instruction booklet*. This is to be sure you don’t miss any directions. You can delete the red type after you finish your final version of each achievement.
- 3) At the very end, re-write each question as an opening statement. This serves to cue the assessor to which of the required questions you are addressing.

Hilite important key phrases using **bold type**, *italics*, or underlining, to make them stand out.

Your accomplishments

What have I done that qualifies as an ‘accomplishment’? You may not realize all the things you have done, because teachers are not in the habit of recording all the ‘extra’ things they do for their students. What have you done beyond the textbook, after hours, on your own, that exemplifies the *accomplished practices* as defined in your NBPTS standards? Possible areas to consider include such things as:

- student advocacy
- work as a mentor or peer teacher
- remediation of struggling teachers
- leadership roles in designing or coordinating curriculum materials
- promoting your subject area
- cross-curricular collaboration
- enlisting parents to take an active role in their children's’ education,
- bringing in community resources,
- staff development in which you were a presenter or coordinator
- sponsoring state conference
- special community outreach that resulted in student success in your subject area
- contributing to the solution of school wide problems and policy issues
- creative/innovative use of technology

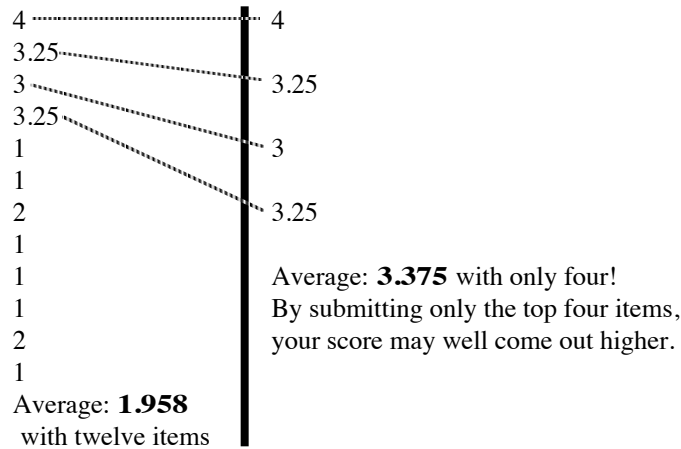
Never lose sight of the fact that ***the STANDARDS are everything!*** Check your standards for the **Family Involvement** and **Contributions to the Profession**. Some broad accomplishments may qualify in multiple categories.

You may find it is possible to combine two or more related ideas to form one really strong entry. Eligible accomplishments may go back as far as five years, except for community / family outreach, which needs to be within the past year.

1. Choose wisely. Forget any accomplishment, no matter how personally significant to you it was, if it cannot be proven to have direct, incontrovertible learning impact on your students.

2. Less is more. As you consider which accomplishments to submit, some will emerge as far more substantive than others. Eliminate the weaker ones, and submit your **best 3 or 4** accomplishments (not more!). Avoid the temptation to overkill. It’s quality, not quantity that counts! Use *only* the strongest, most unequivocally valid accomplishments. *Be sure all three mandated categories are covered* (learner, collaborator/leader, family/community). This can work to your advantage mathematically.

For example, compare submitting **TWELVE** items vs. submitting **FOUR** items



3. Adhere to the rules and strictures

- ◇ Separate *description*, *significance* and *impact*. Be sure you cover all three.
 - ◇ Watch the mandated *page limits* for each item.
 - ◇ Be absolutely sure you *don't overlook some questions* you are expected to answer.
 - ◇ Use **two** or **three** pages for each narrative; remember, you must supply documentation of every claim you make. Remember: *documentation drives your point home*. “A picture (even a mini-photo) is worth 1000 words.”
 - ◇ *State what the student gained/learned*, even if it seems obvious to you. Don't *assume* your reader can visualize anything. Spell everything out so precisely that no one can possibly miss the significance of your accomplishment. Leave nothing inferred, nothing implied, no tacit entendres. And always state a connection to student learning. Explain, clarify, elaborate!
- ◇ **4. Control your style, tone and persona** Load your narrative with *positives*. Remember: *insightful personal observations* are the order of the day. You are writing neither memoirs nor military reports. Mentioning simple, straight-forward clinical observations may make you appear cold, detached, impersonal and remote. Assessors don't want to hear about **you**; they want to hear about **your students**.
- ◇ Write in a style is *gender-neutral*. Important!: to avoid bias, it is essential that you absolutely avoid any piece of information that alludes to your sex, age, state or city.
 - ◇ Use *terminology directly from your standards*; this asserts a proper, professional tone.
 - ◇ Avoid *negative or judgmental observations*.
 - ◇ Add comments that portray you as *student-centered teacher*, focused on individual success.
 - ◇ Make your writing style show you as a *warm, humane, optimistic and compassionate human being*. Where possible, cite several parent/home contacts of praise.
 - ◇ *Be to-the-point*, and leave out the fluff. Broad claims and glittering generalities are worthless; they only dilute the quality of your claims.

5. Connect the dots.

Assessors are looking for **connections** between **what you say** and **what you prove**.

- ◇ Accomplishments are most convincing when they **correlate** to your students' learning needs.
- ◇ Demonstrate the **outcome** of that learning with hard, persuasive documentation.

6. Zero in on impact.

- ◇ Use at least a full page to *explain how each accomplishment impacted your students' learning*.
- ◇ Where possible, show impact by citing a *variety of positive indicators*.
- ◇ *Celebrate your students' triumphs*; elaborate on their success stories one after another.
- ◇ *Personalize* every claim with a first-name example like:

- “ • Johnny's average has improved by 8 points since...
• Frank's class rank has increased from 19th to 5th since...
• For the first time, Mary made perfect scores on her past 3 tests because...
• Carl's mother called to tell me how much she appreciates...
• Howard was so enthused, he asked to borrow my book on Greek mythology ... ”

7. Submit only your best, high-quality documentation. Claiming you did something doesn't prove it's true. Useful artifacts include all sorts of things, such as signed notes, letters, e-mail correspondence, newspaper articles, photos and student work samples. You can also use plan books, inservice records, calendars, verification forms, communication logs, and school newsletters. Flimsy documentation will jeopardize your credibility, so ask yourself: *'Is this evidence convincing? 'Would this win my case in court?'* The most reliable rule-of-thumb is: *'If you can't prove it, don't mention it.'*

- ◇ *Space is precious!* Try to combine several artifacts on one page. Send out individualized contact notes to parents (avoid mail-merge letters!) with a small, defined box for a response. A short personal note can provide just as much evidence as a full-page letter.
- ◇ *A picture is worth a 1,000 words.* Digital photos are good, convincing evidence, and so easy to use!
- ◇ An occasional brief *caption* attached to an artifact serves to connect it in the assessor's mind to some specific claim you made.
- ◇ Evidence of *two-way communication* with the home is especially compelling.
- ◇ Avoid submitting notes or letters that look “coached”. These may look contrived

8. The reflective summary is **not** a recounting.

The **reflective summary** at the end of Entry #4 is as important as all of your accomplishments put together! It is **not** intended to be a recap of your professional accomplishments, but rather an *analysis* of your strengths and weaknesses, and the formulation of a plan to address/remedy whatever issues you see. Assessors will look at this part very carefully, because it *reveals what you have learned about yourself* as a teacher. They are looking for evidence of *introspection* and *professional growth*. What personal insights have you gained through this process of self-examination that will make you a more accomplished teacher? As well as successes, you will see shortcomings, in terms of what you have done and what you have left undone. Moreover, taken as a whole, your accomplishments should reveal *trends in your teaching practice*. Self-discovery is the key! How much have you learned from what you see? Do you have a clear-cut, concrete, practical plan to address your shortcomings in the future? Be sure to lay out a professional development strategy that reflects what you have learned about yourself.

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